THE KING

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A TRAGEDY IN A CONTINUOUS SERIES OF SCENES

BY STEPHEN PHILLIPS



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NOTE

THIS play is constructed after the Greek and not the Shakespearian model, and is divided into a series of scenes, not acts. The subject is one of intense tragedy, but the author hopes that he has treated a story inevitably grim and reminiscent of the Athenian drama, with something of Greek reticence and dignity.

CHARACTERS

PHILIP, King of Spain.
DON CARLOS, his Son and Heir.
SENIOR GONZAGA, Prime Minister.
FERNANDO, an old Servant.
DONNA CHRISTINA, a lady of the Court.

Nobles, Prelates, Courtiers, Courriers, etc.

The Scene is the ancient capital of Madrid.

THE KING

SCENE ONE

THE KING

Princes and prelates, nobles, courtiers, friends !
Now thirty years have I unfaltering
Held in these hands the reins of policy
And here have pacified and there repressed,
Pursuing peace with unsurrendered power.
And much of this felicity I owe
To sage suggestion of Gonzaga here.

[*A murmur of admiration runs through the court.*]

But, friends, I grow aweary of my task,

[*A deeper murmur of astonishment.*]

And would relinquish onerous royalty.
And this high seat I lightly abdicate

Since in my vacant room I set my son Carlos.

[*An applauding shout, which visibly pleases the King.*]

His youth unstained, his grave record
When youthful blood hath license, recommends him.
But that he might not climb these stairs untried,
But straight from battle to a throne proceed,
I have dispatched him against Granada
To expel the encroaching Moor ; each moment now
I look for him ; but happier augury
I publicly proclaim that he shall wed
The princess child of royal Portugal.
This marriage builds a barrier doubly strong,
Against assault a rampart twice secure.

[*Here Donna Christina, a lady of the court, swoons, and is borne outward.*]

So with a twofold gladness I expect
A son that warrior and bridegroom comes.

[*A courrier rushes in breathless and kneels before the King.*]

COURRIER

O King ! great tidings out of Granada !
The city is retaken, the Moor is fled ;
And brightest over all in battle burned
The Prince, who by a sudden flank assault
Drove headlong the surprised Moroccan arms ;
And still they fled, and still the Prince pursued.
Already hard upon me is our host.

[*The sound of drums and bugles of the returning army is heard, and with loud triumphant shouts the court disperses to welcome the victors, leaving only the King and Gonzaga.*]

THE KING

Gonzaga, let me not in flood of joy
Omit a duty. She who swooned but now,
Donna Christina, I have reared till now.
But ere I abdicate I will to leave
A spacious and a broad estate to her,
To be a home, or dowry should she wed.
Her mother I knew well in other days.

I cannot leave her to a youth's caprice,
Who might o'erlook her need, no cause assigned.
Let this not slip!

GONZAGA

O King, be thou assured.

[*A burst of music outside, and Don Carlos rushes in, blood-spattered, and is caught in his father's arms, who holds him close in silence.*]

THE KING

My dear, dear son!—God, for this perfect moment
Let us not suffer afterward. Again,
Again I kiss thee through the spattered blood.
Thou hast no scar?

CARLOS

Scathless have I come off.

THE KING

And now I gird on thee this dazzling toy;

[*He girds a jewelled dagger on the Prince.*]

A toy, yet capable of mortal use.

[*The Prince draws the blade and looks smilingly at it.*]

CARLOS

A pretty thing to wear, if not to use.

THE KING

But still to give felicity a crown,
My son, a bride awaits thee!

[*The Prince starts away from his father, who, however, continues unconsciously.*]

Ah, this news
Strikes sudden on you! Listen, then!

[*He takes the Prince by the arm, walking to and fro excitedly.*]

She is
A royal daughter out of Portugal.
This marriage seals two neighbour kingdoms close,
And builds a bristling frontier 'gainst the Moor.
So you as soldier and as lover reign!

What is your answer ?

[*The Prince remains silent, with bowed head. The King stands gazing at him astonished. A pause.*]

Carlos, answer me !

[*Still the Prince is silent. Again a pause.*]

Boy, look up in my face and speak, at least !
And let me have a human word from you !

CARLOS [*raising his head*]

Father, I am o'er-flurried from the war,
Give me a little pause !

THE KING

A pause ? But why ?
Have I deserved such silence from my son ?
Have I not compassed you with deeper love
Than e'er man gave to woman ? Since you lisped,
Have I not hoarded every whisper up ?
Have I not cried aloud to God for thee ?
Hot speech from you, or maddest reason given,
I can endure, but motionless refusal,

Silence and sullenness I will not bear.
That you must seek and choose your phrase I loathe.
When have I given you cause to hide your thought,
Until this instant so transparent clear !

[*He paces to and fro in agitation, then pauses before his son.*]

Still silent !

CARLOS

Father, give me till to-night !

THE KING

Child, you have not lived long enough to know
What pain you deal me with your secretness.

GONZAGA

Prince, you will pardon me, but on your word
Hangs here the embassy from Portugal.
It will be taken at that fiery court
An insult, making more to war than peace

If this proposèd marriage you defer,
And no cause given.

CARLOS

To-night I'll give the cause,
Father, to you alone—then as you will.

THE KING

How suddenly my bliss is clouded o'er,
And what was free and bright, constrained and dark.
To-night your certain answer then!

[*Going.*]

To-night!

[*Exeunt King and Gonzaga. The Prince passes his hand over his brow in a gesture of doubt and terror.*]

SCENE TWO

DON CARLOS AND CHRISTINA

The scene is a sequestered arbour in an obscure part of the royal garden. Here amid the shrubs and fragrant bushes of that teeming southern land have these two been accustomed to meet. As the curtain rises they are clasped in a silent embrace.

CHRISTINA [*drawing slightly apart from him*]

Dear, all the palace rings with thee ; thy charge
And headlong, wild, improbable assault,
That flung the Moor surprised from Granada ;
And I have listened, glowing secretly.
I said no word, but gloried to myself.
My very silence was more proud than words.
But ah ! before the heroic news came in,
The King, thy father, 'pointing you his heir,
Spoke of an alien marriage politic,
To be a barrier and a wall to Spain.

Then, ah, forgive my weakness, I fell back,
Borne to the air.

CARLOS

This moment I have left
My father for the first time wroth and sad;
For well you know that he and I have lived
Transparent as two friends, no shade between
us.
He broke to me this marriage in blind joy:
I answered not; dear, dear, what could I say?
Last he appointed I must answer him
To-night. The embassy from Portugal
Expects from me a "Yes" that will be "No."

CHRISTINA

Carlos, I feel that I should go from you.
[*He starts and clasps her more closely to him.*]
I stand between you and the public weal.
Beloved, howsoe'er these lips are sweet,
You shall not set my kiss before a throne,
Prefer a lonely woman to the State.
[*He starts impatiently.*]

No! hear me to the end. You shall fulfil
This marriage, love, the issue is too vast;
The safety of this ancient throne, and rule
Of all this murmuring nation. But the heir
That shall be born——

[*She comes close to him, whispering in his ear.*]

our child already lives.

CARLOS

You mean?

CHRISTINA

For the first time I have felt it stir
Within me; then I swooned amid the court.

CARLOS [*in wild agitation*]

Then doubly, trebly, am I now resolved,
Since two lives hang on me, and now not one,
That you shall be my wife, and publicly
Raised to the dazzling splendour I inherit.
O pale the anointing oil, and dim the crown,
If thou wert not beside me sitting; or
I will forego the glory and the war,
The applause, and battle glistening in the sun,

And we will quit the splendour hand in hand,
Walking together like two simple folk,
Who love and cannot see the earth for love.

CHRISTINA

No, no! I must renounce the very life.
The gold presented cup of crimson wine;
And I will be to you as are the dead,
If one can die, and yet consume in flame.
Ah, but renunciation hath a fire,
It is not cold; God knows it is not cold.
What battle like this battle? I forsake
Deliberately, as a woman can,—
For to a man possession is the sum,
The charm, the mystery and azure light;
So strong my love of you; I'll pass away;
And fear not that our babe shall ever know
Who is his father; I will cherish him
By the slow stream and grasses far from courts.
Even now he feels out blindly toward the sun,
Moving in me as in a world obscure.
We two shall be most happy so alone.
If thou, for we are mystically knit,
Shouldst hear a pretty babble in the night,

Out of strange fields, and know it is thy son,
Yet still be strong ; I'll see thee nevermore.

[*Suddenly clasping him to her.*]

No more ! Ah ! but thou'lt come, if only
once !
And I shall run and hurl me on thy heart,
And as out of great darkness see a light.
But no, come not to me ! I'll not forget ;
I shall go down, filled with thee, to the grave.
And still I tell thee, put my arms aside !
A boy thou wast, now seek the sterner task !

CARLOS

A boy ! I am no boy ; deep in my blood,
Too deep, a moment ever to be moved,
My thought of you. Is't the mere touch of
lips,
To feel my circling arm about your waist,
To murmur verses under fading stars ?
Why you encircle me as doth the air,
And nothing breathes or moves apart from you.
The universe hath got from you a soul ;
Since first I saw you, on a fated night,

From the dark palace casement secretly,
Leaning with loosened hair to midnight lilies,
O then more solemn grew the woods, the hills
More strange, the mere more perilous still,
More lone the bird, returning in red light,
And ah ! that moon new brought upon the
heaven !
Thou art more sweet than souls of evening
flowers
In a dim world, and ere a star hath come.
Vain, vain the throne ! for thou alone art real !
But see, the sun is falling down in gold,
And with the night I must await the King.
You'll leave me not ?

[*Again clasping her close.*]

CHRISTINA

I will not. Yet I fear.—

[*He tears himself away as the light rapidly darkens.*]

SCENE THREE

The Throne Room of the Palace. The Prince has asked to see his father alone before giving his answer to the ambassador from Portugal, in regard to the proposed political marriage.

THE KING

Carlos, since first I gave you to the light,
Never a cloud has come between us two.
This is the first, dispel it now with speed !

CARLOS

Father !

THE KING

I have not been o'er-strict with you,
Never asserted a mere father's right.
But we have been as friends ; never before
Have you refused me confidence ; yet now
You stand in guarded silence which I loathe,

As though you must be careful with your
words;
'Tis this I hate, not any folly done,
Whate'er it be; but that you will not speak
To me, to me, at least.

CARLOS

But I will speak;
Forgive me whatsoe'er I shall disclose;
Father, your life serene to all is known,
Your days ascetic, and my mother dead,
Never a woman has had power on you.

THE KING

O, it is that way, is it! so I guessed;
[*Taking his son's arm, he walks to and fro with him in a friendly fashion.*]
Listen! A young man's trouble, natural
To youth, appears to stay you from this
marriage.
'Tis difficult to take a solemn view,
[*The Prince starts.*]

Yes, yes, I know! I only ask of you
That you are free with me; I have the right.
I'll save your blushing cheek and stammering
    tongue;
Hunting perhaps the deer, or walking lone
Through distant villages, you saw some maid,
Simple and sweet amid our summer fields,
Her beauty breathing fragrant as the hay,
And lingering with her in a twilight lane,
Followed the kiss and then the uttered word,
By passion sped, repented in the cold.

CARLOS

No, no, you understand me not at all.

THE KING

Too well I understand. But I would tell you
I cannot take this prank of blood as grave.
    [*Laughing as he walks with the Prince to and fro.*]
Twilight, a hedge of may, and coming stars,
A face amid the dimness! All is said.
Confess now, I have hit you.

CARLOS

Father, no!

THE KING

Still, still you will not satisfy me, boy;
Have I not made confession's pathway soft?
And yet you will not tread it. Silent still!
Now I will humble my white hair to you,
And tell you, I myself, young then as you,
Was drawn into sweet folly; but the throne
Demanded me and all this people's care.
Then I dismissed each wanton, wandering thought,
And set my teeth and rose to sterner things.
And this you too must do; the occasion cries
Aloud for sacrifice of crude desires,
It asks for wisdom, wildness put aside.

CARLOS

Pity me, father!

THE KING

Now that I have bent
So far, as to unfold to my own son

A far-off folly, is it much I ask
That you should open to me all your soul?
Come, come! Some girl you cannot bring to court.

CARLOS

No, for she is already of the court!

THE KING

Ah, this is better. For at least this fault
Was with some lady nobly born?

CARLOS

'Tis so.
She hath been nobly born, and in her face,
Her step, the certain proof of lineage high.

THE KING

But there hath been no secret marriage, speak!

CARLOS

As yet no marriage!

THE KING

Then my fears are o'er.
All this is easy, and what seems to you
So tangled, this Gonzaga can unravel,
For he is ripe and still and unsurprised.
You say it is some lady in my court.
I'll not demand her name; unless you give it,
And be assured, for my own sake that name
Shall never be divulged.

CARLOS

Sir, you have been
So open and so much a trusted friend
All those past years, and now you show yourself
So easy with me that I'll not keep back
The name of her I love.

THE KING

You love? Ah well!—

CARLOS

Believe me that I do.

THE KING [*smiling*]

I once thought so.

Well, well?

CARLOS

The name I call her is Christina.

[*The King starts back, grasping the rail of the throne; there is a breathless pause.*]

Father, I know not of her parentage,
Nor who her mother and her father were;
It is sufficient that she is received
Among the noble ladies of your court.
So much for that; but that her blood is proud,
You, you yourself—if you would scan her close,
Could not deny; even royal I would take her,
But that I know that here she would not stand
Attending, came she true from royalty.

THE KING

[*With difficulty recovering speech*]

But there has been no marriage.

CARLOS

No, not yet.

THE KING

O boy, be frank with me ; I am very old,
If only then that I am old refuse not
Answer !

CARLOS

I will not. All things I will tell.

THE KING

Then how far has this matter gone, say, say !
You think me too impatient, but impatience
Is due to tremulous age. I understand
Almost without the telling, it has been
The kiss forbidden and the secret speech
And ancient poetry beneath the moon,
The touch of hand—yes, yes, perhaps the clasp,
When the last star is fading to the dawn,
No more ?—You understand, I press you not.
But there hath been no more ?

CARLOS

There has been more.

THE KING

But you two, you are not abandoned yet
To the act of fire?

CARLOS

Even to the act of fire.

THE KING

God, God!

CARLOS

O, Sir, you say that you yourself
Were in your youth not guiltless, why of me
Ask such a dread account? Father, I love you,
I love you, ah forgive me.

THE KING

I love you.

CARLOS

Then here I kneel, I pray you to forgive me,
I will not loose your knees till you relent.

THE KING

[*Kissing the bent head of the Prince*]

I kiss you as of old.

CARLOS

I feel your tears
Drop on my hair.

THE KING

Vain tears of an old man.
But one thing else; so far then things have gone
Between you, but no issue of that act?

CARLOS

Alas! I have just learned from her own lips
That I have brought new life into this world.

THE KING

O Thou, that sittest in Thy heaven, relent!
They say that when a thing is done 'tis done.
It is a lie; our lightest act takes wings,
And is made free of space for evermore.

CARLOS

But, father, though a child is born to me
Out of this passion and none borne to you,
Am I therefore more guilty than yourself?

And for this reason now am I resolved
That she shall be my wife, and publicly
My wife proclaimed ; my love had been enough,
But now this marriage is demanded of me.

THE KING

This marriage cannot be.

CARLOS [*angrily approaching his father*]

What, then, shall stay me ?
Let go the crown ! The high, imperial seat !
The glory and the marching hosts of war.
All these are faint beneath a woman's smile.
What then shall stop me, or who shall intervene ?
Not you yourself, you even, my very father.
What high compulsion ?

THE KING

This : I am her father.

[*The King falls backward unconscious on the throne, the Prince staggering from him in horror.*]

SCENE FOUR

Again the secluded arbour. Christina, singing softly to herself, starts suddenly to her feet as she is aware of Carlos standing silently gazing on her ; but not as formerly approaching her.

CHRISTINA

Ah ! [*She rushes towards him. He steps backward, motioning her away. She stands transfixed.*]

Love, why do you motion me away ?
And say no word at all ? Why may I not
Fly to thee to be gathered on thy heart
As ever ? What is my unconscious fault ?
What is my ignorant trespass ? Or has thy
father
Between us fixed a gulf as deep as that
Between the rich man and the poor in hell ?
Or hast thou done some rash thing in thy rage

Carlos, thou hast not stained thy hands in blood ?
Horrible ! in his blood ? Thou dost not stir !
And still and dim thou growest and far-off,
Looking into my eyes a long farewell.
Love, if I may not come to thee, yet tell me,
And swiftly, in warm words, what hath befallen,
What sudden thing hath come between us two?

CARLOS

No sudden thing, but one far back in time.

CHRISTINA

I cannot gather this. Is't that he knows—

CARLOS

He knows.

CHRISTINA

Even then 'tis not in thee
To shudder away from me ; rather to hold me
Closer, and with strong arms to shelter me.

If we have sinned beyond a father's pity,
Then with how many lovers are we damned!

CARLOS [*with repressed passion*]

Believe me that I have not shrunk from you
From ebbing passion, or from guilty fear.
At heaven I'd spit back immortality,
Might I moment cross this yard of ground
That separates us now: but we henceforth
Must keep a measured distance evermore.

CHRISTINA

Is then our love so cursed?

CARLOS [*wildly*]

Cursed? Ah, how cursed!
Lady, no love was ever cursed as this.
Our kiss was potent to put out the stars.

CHRISTINA

Lady!

CARLOS

Come thou no nearer, but declare
Whose child thou art.

CHRISTINA

My mother I remember—

CARLOS

Thy father ?

CHRISTINA

Died, they said, ere I was born.

CARLOS

But if he lives ?

CHRISTINA

He lives ? My father lives ?

CARLOS

And reigns !

CHRISTINA

Carlos, I reel and fall—thy arm !

CARLOS

I must not clasp her, tho' she reel and fall ;
I dare not touch her body even in death.

CHRISTINA

[*recovering herself in slow effort*]

And all that time thy kisses were—how sweet !
[*A pause.*]
Yet all unconsciously we came to this,
And in all innocency have we loved.

CARLOS

Yet unto this we came.

CHRISTINA

O Carlos, now
A sterner summons asketh more of us
Than just to part ; that I should say farewell,
And pass out of thy life for evermore.
Now not to thee alone I say adieu ;
I say farewell to all the earth at once.
I stifle to be gone ; I ache to plunge
In the pure water of the purging grave.

And yet—and yet—O, I must cry it out
To all the gods assembled with cold eyes.
I love, love, love thee, past all bar of birth.
Forgive me, Christ, I cannot help but love him.

CARLOS

Cease! Or I'll leap this interval of earth,
And in the face of God Himself regain thee.

[*A silent flash of lightning is seen.*]

They thrust at us from on high; there is no need:
For me this earthly steel suffices well.

[*Touching the dagger with which he is girded.*]

CHRISTINA

For thee and me—together must we die.

CARLOS

Now 'tis the deep of night.

CHRISTINA

I will not wait
The sun with curious accusing beam.

CARLOS

This love was of the night, not of the sun.

CHRISTINA

This night then, and with speed! Surely we two
Of all who ever loved are most unhappy.
Lovers who fell in death in olden time
Might sob the life out in each other's arms.

CARLOS

Or did she take the poison from his lips.

CHRISTINA

A venom sweet—and all the dark to come!

CARLOS

His whisper weakened, yet into her ear.

CHRISTINA

Dimmer she gazed, but yet into his eyes.

CARLOS

Over them came old odour of red may.

CHRISTINA

Or the sweet rustle of forbidden lanes.

CARLOS

But we with failing breath apart must lie ;
Beautiful earth whereon we must not stay !

CHRISTINA

And you forbidden stars, how bright to leave

CARLOS

On all the glory now we look our last ;
And without kiss,

CHRISTINA

or pressure of the hand,
Albeit we sway together helplessly,
Hopelessly t'ward each other swaying still,
Like trees across a river, then withdraw.

CARLOS

Yet without cry, but with a Roman heart
We seek the steel that giveth honour back.

CHRISTINA [*gently*]

Perchance, when we have winged a separate
flight,
When we are free of flesh, from blood released,
God will not place his bar between our spirits,
For nowise in the spirit have we erred.

CARLOS [*drawing the dagger given him*]

This blade my father gave me in his joy ;
See how the jewelled haft sparkles and gleams.
'Tis fitting we should use it in our sorrow.
Now to some darker place, that we may die.

CHRISTINA

Carlos, *thou*, *thou* wilt kill me first.

CARLOS

I cannot.

CHRISTINA

Give me the steel! I feared that I might strike
Uncertainly: the child here must not linger.

[*She, taking the glittering dagger, goes slowly out, he following her.*]

SCENE FIVE

The King is seen standing near the throne, which he does not ascend, Gonzaga attending.

GONZAGA

[*After a pause. He speaks somewhat lightly*]

The affair no doubt is angry and perplexed.
More deeply difficult than any I
Have disentangled. But no problem yet,
No situation howsoe'er confused,
Hath baffled me ; and with the sagest heads,
The wariest brains, my lot hath been to fight.
Doubt not, Your Majesty, that he who once
Outthought and outdid scheming Angelo,
Shall bring to wisdom fancy of a boy.

THE KING

No fancy, it hath struck too deep, I fear.

GONZAGA

Nothing in youth strikes deep ; or not so deep,
But it can be persuaded or outplucked.
Leave then the boy to me. I have dispatched
On all sides messengers to find him out
And bring him to a private conference
Forthwith ; he hath not gone far in so short a time.
Leave him to me and be yourself unseen.
You by, I cannot undertake to speak
That which I have already in my mind.
And I have here a list of those most near,
Both to your throne and heart ; to call them in
And at the fitting moment speak to them.
But be not seen ; each moment he may come.
Such was the summons that he must obey.

THE KING

I'll go apart ; God aid your conference.

[*Exit the King. Meanwhile a courrier has entered, with lantern, who stands silent.*]

GONZAGA [*seeing Courrier*]

Well, have you found the Prince ? When will
he come ?

FIRST COURRIER

My lord, where'er you sent me I have searched
But found no sign.

GONZAGA

Nor heard you any news ?

FIRST COURRIER

From no one could I glean a certain word.
[*A second courrier appears on the other side.*]

GONZAGA [*to First Courrier*]

Well, go again ! Don Carlos must be found.
[*Exit First Courrier. Gonzaga turns on the second.*]
And you ?

SECOND COURRIER

All o'er the palace garden dark
I sought and left no cranny unexplored.

Night makes more difficult our task; the eye
Deceives, and we must touch to be assured.

[*A third courrier comes in behind him.*]

GONZAGA

You there who come behind, you have some clue?

THIRD COURRIER

None, none, my lord, I fear the Prince is gone.

GONZAGA

Gone whither?

THIRD COURRIER

That I cannot tell. But we
Lose time to look for him still hereabout.

GONZAGA

Back, both of you! Although all night you spend.

You'll be well paid; the King for tidings
chafes.

[*Exeunt Second and Third Courriers. Gonzaga, impatiently turning from them, encounters an old man, entering slowly on the opposite side, holding his left hand behind him.*]

GONZAGA

Ah! old Fernando! well from you I knew
I would have certain tidings at the last.
Is the Prince on his way?

FERNANDO

Ay! But not hither.

GONZAGA

Darkly you speak. And why behind you held
Your left hand, as to hide some precious thing?
A jewel is it?

FERNANDO

'Tis a jewelled thing.

GONZAGA

What, then ?

FERNANDO

[*holding a dagger blood-stained*]
A blade, and dyed with twofold blood.
[*Gonzaga starts back in horror.*]

GONZAGA

This is his answer eloquent to me !

FERNANDO

This blood I know ; 'tis that of my young lord ;
For I have bound up many a careless wound
He has incurred ; the other blood was strange.
But I have found from whom the stream hath flowed.

GONZAGA

Say then what other blood with his is mixed.

FERNANDO

I came upon two lying motionless
In a dark covert ; and the moon was full.

They lay in no embrace, not even hand
In hand was clasped, nor to each other turned ;
As though they feared each other more than
death,
And yet they looked a lover and his love.
The Prince I knew, and by his side the blade.
The other——

GONZAGA

But one other there could lie.
Give me the knife ! You still composure keep,
And summon all of those here written down,
That they attend forthwith in the outer
room
The pleasure of the King. Take this and go.

[*Exit Fernando with papers. Gonzaga stands gazing on the dagger held before him. Silently the King enters from behind the throne. There is a pause.*]

THE KING

That blade I gave to Carlos.

GONZAGA

He hath used it.

[*The King for a time preserves a deadly calm.*]

THE KING

This is the life-blood of my only son.

GONZAGA

O King!

THE KING

And she——

GONZAGA

She too hath dyed the steel.

THE KING

Strange that I cannot cry aloud, nor weep!
Give me the dagger! It is doubly mine;
This horror muffles me as in a dream,
And all unreal is this encrusted toy.

[*Suddenly, with a loud cry, he reels backward, caught in Gonzaga's arms.*]

My children !

[*A pause ; slowly he recovers himself.*]

Two I had ; a boy and girl,
I with a far-off kiss have slain them both.
If they can die so young, then I so old
Will follow them down to an equal tomb,
I, the grand cause, and this at least I owe,
My place is with them.

GONZAGA [*pointing to the throne*]

No, thy place is there,
With suicide an opiate refused,
And madness a rejected luxury.
Thy life is not thy own ; thou canst not now
Abdicate, leaving on the throne a ghost ;
Whate'er it cost, thou must resume thy reign.
And I have news of the advancing Moors,
Of Granada retaken ; in the hour
Of public peril crush the private grief ;
The nobles, sharers of our inner mind,
I have convened already ; they wait
A word to gather round thee as of old.

THE KING

Summon them !

[*Gonzaga gives a sign, and the higher nobles of the court enter the Throne Room in silence.*]

Gentlemen, but a little while ago
My abdication I declared and made
My son successor to this arduous chair.
Friends—my son is dead and lies self-slain
In the dark garden; through my fault he died.
When I was young I took too little heed,
And in rash passion I begot a child,
A daughter whom I brought into the court.
This was a young man's folly natural,
But see to what a doom those kisses led.
My son, if my voice break a little, yet
Have patience; my dear son this daughter loved,
Unknowing.

[*A murmur of astonishment amid the court, who yet preserve a respectful silence.*]

They two secretly would meet.

My sin was but a rehearsal of their sin,
A sad enacting of the tragic scene.
With a new life he filled her, learning then
That they inherited a common blood.
They saw but one path, and that path they
took,
And lie together in some grand embrace,
Not now forbidden. When this doom I heard,
I too resolved me on a similar grave.
But now I see how easy it is to die,
How hard to live. This throne I re-ascend.

[*He mounts the steps of the throne alone, unaided.*]

Bring me again the crown, anoint me fresh
With oil ; a second coronation be.

[*The crown is again placed on his head, he is anointed with oil, in silence and with no triumphant cry.*]

Here I resume my reign without a hope ;
My life is ashen, as this ashen dawn
That comes upon the windows colourless ;
It is as grey, it is as cold, as faint.
Yet here I take it up. I had supposed

That double death were punishment enough ;
Sequel how solemn to so frail an hour.
But God, unsatisfied, must still inflict
This grander chastisement, that I must reign,
And unforgetting seem that I forget,
Losing dead children in a living task.
I have laid bare my soul before you all,
Nothing have I concealed and nothing slurred.
Most humbly now I re-ascend the throne.

[*The whole of the court fall on their knees in a silence of supplication. There is a pause.*]

Hark ! In the bleakness a half-note of birds.

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